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# FOREIGN AGRICULTURE CIRCULAR

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## WORLD SHEEP NUMBERS IN 1948 AND 1949

World sheep numbers, estimated at 720 million head at the beginning of 1949, continued to increase for the second consecutive year, according to the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations. These numbers are about 5 million head above the preceding year, but 20 million head, or 3 percent, below the 1936-40 prewar average. The generally improved grazing conditions and higher prices received for wool, mutton and lamb have encouraged expansion of flocks in some of the major sheep-producing areas of the world.

SHEEP: Estimated world total, by continents,  
average 1936-40, annual 1948-49.

Continent or area	Average				Increase (+) or decrease (-)	
	1936-1940	1948 1/	1949 1/	1949	1949	1948
	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Percent	Percent	Percent
North America	59,700	42,300	39,000	-35	-8	-8
Europe	123,400	105,800	109,500	-11	+3	+3
Soviet Union	66,000	64,800	2/	--	--	--
Asia	147,100	152,900	2/	--	--	--
South America	100,900	122,900	118,600	+17	-3	-3
Africa	99,500	91,100	91,600	-8	+0.5	+0.5
Oceania	144,000	135,100	140,300	-3	+4	+4
Total	740,600	714,900	720,100	-3	+1	+1

1/ Preliminary.

2/ Estimate included in the total.

Although sheep numbers increased in many of the important producing countries, the principal gains occurred in Australia, Turkey, Spain, Rumania, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. These gains more than offset the declines that took place in the United States, Argentina and China. Notwithstanding the increases, sheep numbers in Australia and most of the European and African countries continue to be below the 1936-40 prewar average. On the other hand, numbers in the United States, the United Kingdom and Rumania

are the lowest in many years and are now 38, 26 and 19 percent, respectively, below their prewar levels.

Factors which have affected sheep production varied with the respective producing countries. Numbers in Canada and the United States have fallen off largely because of more profitable alternative agricultural enterprises. A similar situation, together with inadequate market outlets, has caused numbers to decline in Argentina.

Recovery of sheep numbers in the United Kingdom has been retarded by the further development of the dairy industry, which competes for grasslands and fodder crops. More favorable grazing conditions and increased demand for wool, and to a lesser extent, for mutton and lamb, contributed to the sizable increase in Australia, Turkey, Spain and the Soviet Union, while the effects of war reduced numbers in China and Greece. Generally, inadequate grazing throughout the year and unfavorable weather conditions at the time of lambing have slowed up recovery in other sheep-producing areas of the world.

Further recovery of world sheep numbers will depend principally on favorable growing conditions and greater economic returns from sheep farming in relation to other farm enterprises. Profitableness of the sheep business is the factor that will determine whether producers in Canada, Argentina and the United States will expand their flocks. In the principal wool-producing countries, the price of wool will be the deciding factor as to whether or not herds are expanded, while in other countries, the price of mutton and lamb and the domestic need for wool will be the determining factor in increasing numbers.

The number of sheep on farms and ranches in the United States at the beginning of 1949 were estimated at 31,963,000 head, about 8 percent below the preceding year. This is the seventh consecutive year that sheep numbers have declined and numbers are now the smallest on the record in 81 years. Several factors apparently have contributed to the continued decline in numbers. Among these were more profitable alternatives in farming and ranching, high prices for feeder and slaughter lambs, losses to predatory animals and higher cost of production. There seems to be no possibility of checking a further decline this year since the number of ewes retained for breeding are down again from a year ago.

In Canada, sheep numbers on farms December 1, 1948, were estimated at 1,322,000 head, compared with 1,587,000 head, a decline of nearly 17 percent from a year earlier. The latest estimate indicates that numbers are less than one-half of the 1936-40 average. The downward trend in numbers is expected to continue since economic returns from other livestock and crop farming are greater and more easily obtainable than from sheep farming. The difficulty in obtaining suitable labor and increasing losses to predatory animals are other factors that contribute to reduction of Canadian sheep numbers.



Mexican sheep numbers in December, 1948, were reported to have decreased about 5 percent over the preceding year. Although numbers dropped in 1948, current estimates are only about 5 percent below the 1936-40 average. The 1948 drought in northern Mexico is believed to have caused most of the decline, while numbers in other areas remained unchanged.

The United Kingdom, the second largest producer of sheep on the European continent, increased its sheep and lamb numbers in 1948 by 9 percent over the preceding year. Current estimates are about 26 percent below prewar, or 7 million head below the 1936-40 prewar average. Sheep numbers have not recovered very rapidly from the drastic losses which occurred in the winter and spring of 1946-47. Several relatively normal lamb crops will be needed to bring numbers back to the 1946 level. Recovery has been checked by several factors. Among some of the more important ones are the development of dairying which competes for the limited grasslands and fodder crops and the Government's agricultural policy which favors production of milk over sheep husbandry. However, in view of a slightly improved price relationship of sheep to other farm commodities, a moderate increase in numbers may be expected in 1949.

In Spain, sheep numbers are reported to have increased during 1947 and 1948. Current numbers are reported to be somewhat above the 1936-40 average. The mild winter of 1947 and 1948 and improved moisture conditions, following the severe drought between 1944 and 1946, have materially improved pasture conditions which has resulted in considerable recovery in sheep numbers. Whether numbers will remain at the present level throughout 1949 seems to depend entirely on moisture and pasture conditions this year. Sheep and lamb numbers in Portugal are believed to have remained relatively constant during the past several years. Drought conditions early this year and loss of newborn lambs, in all probability, will preclude any increase in 1949.

Sheep numbers in Italy are continuing their upward trend and are believed to be approaching the 1936-40 level. If growing conditions are favorable, a further increase in numbers can be anticipated. In France, the 1949 sheep numbers increased around 1 percent to continue the upward trend which began in 1945. These numbers are still 23 percent below the prewar level. Heavy slaughter between August 1947 and February 1948 held back sheep recovery during 1948.

In 1948, sheep numbers in Poland made a very significant recovery and the upward trend in all probability will continue in 1949, unless growing conditions become unfavorable. Present numbers are believed to be around half a million head below the prewar estimate. Hungarian sheep numbers are continuing upward with nominal year-to-year increases and are now less than one-half of prewar numbers.

In Yugoslavia, sheep numbers are believed to be continuing the upward trend and may be approaching the 1936-40 level.

Bulgarian sheep numbers are believed to have increased in 1948 to continue the upward trend which began in 1945 and present numbers are larger

than prewar. In Czechoslovakia, sheep numbers, at the beginning of the year, were somewhat larger than the preceding year and only slightly under the 1936-40 average.

Official statistics indicate that Rumanian sheep numbers have continued to increase during 1948 and are now the highest since 1945. Favorable pasture conditions in 1947 and the mild winter of 1947-48 encouraged rebuilding of flocks. Present numbers are estimated to be approximately 20 percent below the 1936-40 average. Sheep numbers in Greece declined in 1948 and a further drop is probable in 1949 because of the guerilla warfare.

Sheep numbers in the Soviet Union, at the beginning of the year, are believed to have made a further increase and may now exceed the 1936-40 average. Drought or near drought conditions in the principal sheep-producing areas are believed to have held the 1948 increase down. Under normal growing conditions, it can be assumed that yearly increases can be anticipated, particularly as long as their predetermined production plans are followed.

On the Asiatic continent, Turkey is believed to have had the largest increase in sheep numbers during 1948 and are now probably 15 percent larger than the 1936-40 average. Both taxable and non-taxable sheep are included and the taxable number may be underestimated. It is possible that the severe winter of 1948-49, with poor housing arrangements and inadequate feed, may have caused a higher than normal mortality among sheep numbers. In Iraq, sheep numbers are the largest ever reported. Since the war, the British Army has not been exporting sheep, nor consuming any domestic mutton or lamb. There have been no serious losses due to disease. All of these factors have enabled sheep numbers to rise. Although sheep numbers in India are believed to have declined in 1947, it is also believed that most of the drop was recovered in 1948, since the sheep industry is the mainstay of a large number of people and constitutes a significant portion of the livestock industry. China is the principal country in Asia where sheep numbers are below 1948 and considerably below the 1936-40 prewar average. With the civil war extending over a large part of China and much of the country under the control of the invaders, it can only be assumed that sheep and other livestock are feeling the first effects and in all probability numbers are lower than a year earlier.

In August, 1948, the total sheep and lamb numbers in the Union of South Africa had increased about 7 percent over 1947, but were 17 percent below the 1936-40 average. Favorable wool-price relationship since 1946 and general improvement in pasture conditions following the 1943-46 drought have encouraged some expansion of flocks and numbers. Although a drought during December and until mid-January caused considerable concern in some areas, it is believed that the retention of sheep for breeding, reduction in slaughter, and a generally improved feed situation are likely to hold 1949 numbers near the 1948 level. In French Morocco and French West Africa, sheep numbers in 1948, according to reports, showed a considerable increase. Numbers in French Morocco are somewhat below prewar, while French West Africa exceeds the 1936-40



average by about one-half million head. In Algeria, sheep numbers continued the upward trend in 1948. If the present favorable conditions continue, a further increase is likely to occur in 1949. Other changes in Africa appear to be insignificant.

Sheep numbers in Argentina, one of the larger sheep producing countries of the world, dropped off considerably in 1948. It is likely that the 1949 numbers will be considerably below the 1948 level. Current estimates place numbers somewhat above the 1936-40 average. Reduced slaughterings and smaller marketings in 1948, according to trade sources, indicate that producers are holding out some stock for flock expansion and that sheep numbers may be recovering slightly.

Many factors are reported to be operating against any immediate sizable expansion. Prices paid for mutton and lamb seem to be causing producers to shift to more profitable farm enterprises. Some large-scale sheep producers are liquidating entire holdings in favor of general agriculture. Sharp rises in land values in 1947 and 1948 are causing many to turn to more intensive agriculture. Higher freight rates, higher taxes and labor difficulties also contributed to the producers' hesitation to expand their flocks.

Uruguayan sheep numbers are reported to have reached 22,000,000 head, showing a steady increase for several years, and are now perhaps the largest in history. Current numbers are around 23 percent above the 1936-40 prewar average. The sharp decrease in slaughterings in 1948, according to a recent report, is attributed to the high price of wool, since it apparently was more profitable to retain old wethers and ewes for their wool production rather than to sell them for meat. As long as these conditions continue, further increase can be anticipated.

In Peru, sheep numbers are reported to have remained at around 17,000,000 head, about 16 percent larger than the 1936-40 average. There appears to be a slow upward trend with regard to sheep improvement and better grades of wool. It is also indicated that increasing domestic consumption may in a few years eliminate Peru as an exporter of wool. As the quality of wool improves and the yield per animal increases, it is considered possible that numbers will decline simultaneously, as the range is frequently overgrazed.

There appears to have been no significant change in Brazil's sheep numbers during the past several years. Since 1946 numbers have been about 40 percent larger than the 1936-40 prewar average. High prices for wool in Rio Grande do Sul, due to exhaustion of stocks 6 months before the next clip, is expected to cause a rise in prices for the next crop. As a result, slaughter may be reduced and animals saved for shearing. All mutton exports originate in Rio Grande do Sul.

The number of sheep in Australia, as of March 31, 1948, had reached 102,559,000 head. These numbers were approximately 10 million head below the 1936-40 average. Increases were reported to have occurred in all the states,

with the largest numerical rises taking place in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. It is indicated that sheep and lamb numbers have probably increased by several million head since a year ago. Satisfactory lambing in 1948, a generally improved feed situation in most pastoral areas and increasing wool prices can be expected to be reflected in a substantial increase in 1949 sheep numbers.

Although the number of sheep in New Zealand had declined about 200,000 head by April, 1948, it is anticipated that numbers this year will increase and possibly exceed the 1947 level of nearly 32.7 million head. The number of sheep in New Zealand has exceeded the 1936-40 average for the past several years. In order to meet lamb and mutton export commitments for the next several years a gradual upward increase in numbers may be necessary.

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This is one of a series of regularly scheduled reports on world agricultural production, approved by the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations Committee on Foreign Crops and Livestock Statistics. For this report the committee was composed of Joseph A. Becker, Chairman, C. M. Purves, Elmer A. Reese, Hazel B. Kefauver, Karen J. Friedmann, and Dwight R. Bishop.





Continent and country	Month of estimate	Average		1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
		1931-35	1936-40						
		Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands
<b>NORTH AMERICA</b>									
Canada.....	Dec. 1	1/3	2,762	2,651	2,733	2,822	2,456	1,782	1,587
Guatemala.....	July		174	273	368				618
Mexico.....	Dec. 31	1/4/5	3,674	3/5/4,809	4,673	4,704	4,754	4,742	1/
United States.....	Jan. 1		53,100	51,404	50,782	46,520	42,436	37,818	34,827
Estimated total.....			60,200	59,700	59,000	54,900	50,600	45,400	42,300
<b>EUROPE</b>									
Albania.....			1,503	3/	1,576		1,700		
Austria.....	Dec. 3	1/4/6	263	316	444	460	391	399	474
Belgium.....	Jan. 1	1/4	187	174	213	199	177	144	107
Bulgaria 1/.....	Dec. 31	1/	8,188	8,746	8,600	7,100	7,800	8,784	
Czechoslovakia 2/.....	Jan. 1			492	519	560	510	490	459
Denmark.....	July 15	4/	179	147	203	213	170	91	77
Eire.....	June		3,283	3,076	2,663	2,581	2,423	2,094	2,058
Finland.....	Mar. 1	9/	973	1,007	965	1,015	1,099	982	999
France.....	Fall	1/	9,812	9,648	10/6,715	6,300	6,632	7,259	7,406
Germany 11/.....	Dec. 1	1/	3,729	3,729	4,349		3,018	2,988	3,150
Greece.....	Dec. 31	1/	7,227	8,304			6,262	7,205	7,056
Hungary.....	Spring		1,204	1,490	1,199	328	370	488	591
Iceland.....	Spring		696	624	539	532		8,600	505
Italy.....	July	4/6/10	269	9,453	6,966	7,100	7,900	8,600	
Netherlands.....	May	3/	661	636	460	489	558	460	425
Norway.....	June		1,725	1,742	1,795	1,760	1,707	1,698	1,629
Poland 12/.....	June 30			1,941		1,760	1,760	1,707	1,406
Portugal.....	Dec. 31	1/13/	3,274	3,948	3,700	710	759	10/	
Romania 12/.....	Dec. 31	1/15/	9,736	9,736		3,500	3,900	4,000	
Spain.....	Dec. 31	1/3/	17,948	20,000			6,799	7,100	
Sweden.....	Summer		542	398	24,310	22,000	20,183		22,000
Switzerland.....	April	4/	185	177	558	516	482	421	349
United Kingdom.....	June		26,047	26,112	209	193	195	182	170
Yugoslavia.....	Dec. 31	1/	8,471	9,796	20,107	20,150	20,358	16,713	18,164
Estimated total.....			15/123,900	123,400	108,700	100,200	100,900	101,900	105,800
<b>Soviet Union 12/.....</b>									
	Jan. 1		-	66,000	-	-	61,100	60,800	64,800
<b>ASIA</b>									
Cyprus 11/.....	March		290	300	303	331	315		
Iran.....	Mar. 21		14,696	14,497	13,730	13,020	12,950	13,190	13,000
Iraq.....	Jan.	3/	6,645	7,090	6,000	7,250	8,000		9,000
Palestine 11/.....	Spring		218	209					
Syria.....	Dec. 31	1/	-	2,060	2,216	2,777	3,091	3,260	3,176
Trans-Jordan.....			220	216	273	296			
Turkey.....	Dec. 31	1/4/	13,591	21,656	21,105	22,450	23,386	23,387	
British Malaya 18/.....			228	339			152	175	
China 19/.....	May	3/	30,000	26,000	21,000	21,000	20,000	22,000	
India.....	Dec. 31	1/	43,347	43,258		48,000	49,000	50,000	
Netherlands Indies.....	Dec. 31	1/4/	1,804	1,614				1,610	
Estimated total.....			143,200	147,100	142,500	146,900	148,900	152,700	154,100

<b>SOUTH AMERICA</b>									
Argentina.....	July	3/	40,566	3/	44,900	56,182	55,000	20/	54,000
Bolivia.....	Dec. 31	1/	5,126	3/	2,608	4,014	-	-	4,289
Brazil.....	Sept.	3/	11,673	3/	11,438	13,283	15,542	-	16,000
Chile.....	June	4/	6,083	3/	5,855	6,040	5,900	-	6,000
Colombia.....	Dec. 31	1/	853	3/	916	-	1,800	-	-
Ecuador.....		21/	1,500	-	-	-	1,158	-	-
Paraguay.....	Dec. 31	1/	191	3/	159	210	255	-	-
Peru.....		1/	12,000	4/	14,900	-	17,288	-	-
Uruguay.....	April	3/	17,982	4/	17,931	20,289	19,567	-	20,500
Estimated total.....			96,700		100,900	119,400	121,400	122,000	122,900
<b>AFRICA</b>									
Algeria 11/.....	Nov. 1	1/	5,578		6,180	5,529	5,376	-	4,800
Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.....			2,310	3/	2,500	-	-	-	-
Kenya.....		3/	3,240	3/	3,274	-	3,160	-	-
Tanganyika.....	Dec. 31	1/	2,212		1,780	2,208	2,216	-	2,366
Basutoland.....			1,884		1,443	-	1,545	-	1,703
British Somaliland.....			2,500	3/	2,900	-	-	-	-
Egypt.....	June	6/	1,353	3/	1,771	1,400	1,385	-	1,400
French Morocco 11/.....	Dec. 31	1/	7,764		9,976	12,870	8,620	-	6,031
French West Africa and Togo.....			8,567	3/	8,674	8,160	8,570	-	9,100
Madagascar 11/.....	Dec. 31	1/	194		193	229	158	-	153
Southern Rhodesia.....	Dec. 31	1/	350		310	320	330	-	325
South West Africa.....			1,156	3/	2,972	-	-	-	-
Spanish Morocco 11/.....		3/	553		481	699	443	-	600
Tunisia.....	Dec. 31	1/	2,967		3,026	3,220	2,974	-	2,783
Union of South Africa.....	August		44,094		39,899	-	30,832	-	30,723
Estimated total.....			98,800		99,500	98,900	90,700	85,800	91,100
<b>OCEANIA</b>									
Australia.....	Mar. 31	1/	111,417	1/	112,571	123,174	96,396	-	95,723
New Zealand.....	Apr. 30		28,793		31,352	33,200	33,000	-	32,682
Estimated total.....			140,200		144,000	156,400	129,400	128,500	135,100
Estimated world total.....			709,100		740,600	743,900	703,000	697,100	714,900

1/ End of year estimates (October to December) included under following year for comparisons and totals. Thus, for Canada the December 1943 estimate of 2,733,000 is shown under 1944. 2/ Preliminary. 3/ Average for 2 to 4 years only. 4/ Census or estimate for single year. 5/ June. 6/ March. 7/ Includes Southern Dobruja, beginning 1944. Years 1944-46 adjusted to make comparable series. 8/ Present territory excludes Sub-Carpathian Russia. 9/ September. 10/ Official statistics; may be an underestimate of actual numbers. 11/ Totals for 4 zones of occupation. 12/ Present territory. 13/ Census, December 31, 1944. 14/ Census, December 31, 1940. 15/ Average for years 1930-39. 16/ Not strictly comparable with later years, due to territorial changes. 17/ Data include only number taxed. 18/ Data include goats. 19/ Includes China Proper (22 provinces), Manchuria, Jehol, and Sinkiang (Turkestan). 20/ The Census of May 10-12, 1947, reported 50,856,566 sheep on farms. 21/ Year 1929.

Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations. Prepared or estimated on the basis of official statistics of foreign governments, reports of U.S. Foreign Service officers, and other information. Data relate to prewar boundaries, unless otherwise noted. Totals include estimates for countries for which official statistics are unavailable.







